

NOW
Including

Nostalgic
Cars
Dedicated to American Postwar Classics

NOVEMBER 1988 \$3.50/\$4.00 CANADA

Car Collector

& Car Classics

1957 Cadillac Eldorado Brougham

1953 Oldsmobile Super 88
Holiday Coupe

1967 Cougar XR-7 GT

Chrysler's Styling Ratings

1935 Mercedes-Benz
Special Roadster

ANTIQUE • CLASSIC • MILESTONE • SPORTS • NOSTALGIC CARS



—Postwar
Collectibles—

Cadillac

1957 Eldorado Brougham
On the edge of rationality. . .



by Dennis Adler

PHOTOS BY AUTHOR

Let it never be said that General Motors is a conservative corporation. On outward appearance it may look that way, but GM has had its moments — just to name a few: Corvette, Corvair and the Cadillac Eldorado Brougham. Oh yes, Cadillac — that bastion of respectability among the General Motors division — has more than once trod upon the edge of rationality, the most classic case being the introduction of the Cadillac Eldorado Brougham in 1957.

The Brougham was nothing short of a passion play, Cadillac's retort to the Lincoln Continental and probably, despite its ultimate failure, a vehicle that was far ahead of its time — one that introduced features that are still relevant to this very day!

The Eldorado Brougham drew much of its exterior styling from GM's Orleans show car that premiered at the 1953 Motorama. The pillarless four-door concept was a favorite of GM stylist Harley Earl, as was his design for the stainless steel roof, a feature that is still available on Eldorados to this day.

The body styling was totally new for Cadillac in '57 and the Brougham was built on a wheelbase some 23 inches shorter than the major portion of the Cadillac line. The distance between the front and rear wheel centers was a mere 126 inches, and the Brougham's overall length was 216-5/16 inches — a touch over 18 feet from bumper guards to tailfins. It was 55.5 inches from the ground to the top of the polished stain-

less steel roof, and the interior was a cavernous 78.5 inches across. It was a short, wide, low car powered by a 356cid 90° ohv V-8 Cadillac engine developing a hefty 335 horsepower. Along with everything else, the Brougham could move out like a sports car when you pressed the pedal to the floor. The song *Hot Rod Lincoln* could just about have been written as *Hot Rod Eldo*. Of course, Eldo doesn't rhyme with "drinkin'..."

For 1957, the Eldorado Brougham was as futuristic a car as the practicality of assembly line manufacturing would allow. It introduced the use of quad headlights, an industry first.* Among its many other "firsts" was a

*Rambler introduced quad headlights later in 1957.



suspension system designed by long time Cadillac engineers Lester Milliken and Fred Cowin. The Eldorado had no leaf springs. In their place, Cadillac used an innovative air suspension system consisting of an air spring at each wheel made up of a domed air chamber, rubber diaphragm and a piston. The domes were fed by a central air compressor and continually adjusted for level and road conditions via a system of valves and solenoids. GM also offered the air suspension system on

several other makes, but only the Cadillac featured an *open system* that drew its air from the outside atmosphere. A brilliant concept, but unfortunately in this early form, a dismal failure. If the cars sat undriven for more than a few days they would begin to sink and after a week an owner could expect to find his expensive Eldorado sitting less than three inches off the pavement. (GM could have made a killing marketing this system to Low Riders, but to Cadillac owners it was

far from amusing.) It averaged 20 minutes to reinflate the suspension after the engine was started. And there were other failures with the system that led many owners to have their cars converted to leaf spring suspensions.

The novelty of power accessories was still new and the Brougham capitalized on every conceivable power option. Aside from the usual — power windows, power door locks, and even power operated ventipanes — the trunk could be electrically opened and



"The values of Cadillacs built in the late-1950s have risen to such heights in the past few years, that Cadillac might do well to discontinue their present car lines and start building '57 Eldos again!"

— Anonymous critic

For 1957, the Eldorado Brougham was as futuristic a car as the practicality of assembly line manufacturing would allow.



closed from a switch in the glove box. Even with the key inserted in the trunk lock, the trunk opened and closed electrically. In all, that one convenience took three motors to operate; one to open, one to close, and a third motor to lock the trunk. Even the starter was automatic, only requiring the key to be turned to *ON*, at which point the car would start itself. If the engine stalled in traffic (it's reputed to have happened once), the Eldorado would automatically restart itself, remindful of the starter system used by Pierce-Arrow and others in the early-1930s.

Naturally, the front seats were power operated, but the Brougham went beyond mere mortal power adjustments. Three controls on the driver's door armrest could be dialed in to automatically adjust distance from the pedals, seat height, and seatback tilt for two different drivers. All the occupant had to do was turn the knobs to the pre-selected color (either red or green) and the seat would change. In addition, when the engine was turned off the seat automatically moved all the way back and down to allow easier entry and exit. About the only thing the car didn't do was open the doors automatically and it *almost* did that with a spring-powered assist to aid in pushing the extremely heavy portals outward.

In 1957, you could purchase a Cadillac for as low as \$4677 (Makes ya wanna cry, don't it?). The Eldorado Brougham ran a tad more (\$13,074), the most expensive Cadillac and the most expensive American car built in 1957. In fact, the Brougham cost more than a brand new Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud! Think about the comparative values between Rolls and Cadillac today . . .

You did get quite a few extras for the money, however. Along with leather upholstery and Mouton carpeting, the Eldorado Brougham came with the *Vanity Set* — probably the most complete package of accessories ever offered in an American car. Included in the front glove compartment was a comb and mirror, lipstick holder, tissue dispenser (which also could contain in place of tissues, a flask of your favorite libation), and to ensure that the drink could be shared, the glove box also contained four silver cups with magnetic bases to sit on the steel ledge of the glove box door. There was also a compact and powder puff for the ladies and a cigarette pack holder for the gents. In the rear seat center arm rest



The Brougham's introduction of quad headlights was an industry first. The Art Deco openings underneath are, perhaps, an effort to recall the stylized trumpet horns from 1933 (see last month's centerspread).

was a compartment which held an atomizer with Arpege perfume, a mirror and a leather notebook finished in matching color to the car's interior: either white, black, blue, light grey, dark grey, green or beige.

Overall, the Eldorado Brougham was the most outrageous model Cadillac put on the road since the war. As a showcase for new concepts it was a *tour de force*, just as the Orleans show car had been, but as a sales leader it was something less. In 1957, Cadillac built 114,472 Series 62 models, 24,000 Sixty Specials, 4069 Series 75's, 3900 Eldorado Seville and Biarritz models, but only 400 Eldorado Broughams. In 1958 only 304 were produced. In 1959, with a totally redesigned coachwork contracted out to Carrozzeria Pininfarina in Italy (just as is done today for the Allante body), only 99 were built and only 101 in 1960, the last year for the limited production Eldorado Broughams.

Cadillac had stepped off the edge of rationality just long enough to build a collector car for the future; one that is the consummate example of an era when going to extremes was the norm, when excess was the fashion, a time of chrome, fins and flash. Ah, Americana!

Our Postwar Collectible is owned by Ted Davidson and Herb Rothman of Yorba Linda, California. Painted in Nairobi Pearl (the original color), it was purchased in 1972 from the original owners in near perfect condition and with only 84,000 original miles.



Also see *CAR COLLECTOR'S* cover story on the Eldorado Brougham in our March 1978 issue available from our back issue department for \$5.